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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 4942
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1084
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003042

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: THAILAND POLITICAL CRISIS: BANGKOK QUIET IN
AFTERMATH OF OCTOBER 7 CLASH

REF: A. BANGKOK 3032
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3020
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 3006

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The streets of Bangkok's government district were quiet October 8 after a day and evening of violence left a large number of demonstrators and police injured and two dead. Thai police told us that a number of People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) demonstrators had been armed with weapons and makeshift bombs; an international journalist told us he witnessed PAD demonstrators firing guns at police late on October 7. Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat told foreign envoys October 8 that the RTG was committed to moving forward with international commitments despite the ongoing domestic conflict. Coup rumors continued to circulate, despite denials the day prior (ref A); MFA Permanent Secretary Virasakdi Futrakul asked the Ambassador for on the record response October 8 on likely international reaction to a coup.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment. In the aftermath of the October 7 clashes, the government and the PAD appeared to be taking stock and assessing options. The number of injuries from the clashes appeared to be greater than would be expected for a demonstration that had been dispersed by tear gas, but poor training in use of the equipment may explain the high injury totals. The ongoing coup rumors are troubling, despite Army Commander General Anupong's continued public and private insistence that the military would not involve itself in the political process. Building on the Ambassador's October 7 conversation with Supreme Commander Songkitti we will continue to stress to our military contacts that the international community expects that the conflict will be resolved by democratic means. End Summary and Comment.

TAKING STOCK OF THE CLASH, BANGKOK MOSTLY QUIET

[1](#)3. (SBU) With gruesome pictures of the October 7 street battles dominating newspaper headlines, Bangkok was mostly quiet October 8. There had not been any major movements or actions by the PAD as of the end of the day. A police

officer at the Dusit district police station told us that demonstrators were not active outside the Government House compound and the Makkhawan bridge area.

14. (C) Despite headlines filled with pictures of injured PAD demonstrators, the reality of the October 7 clashes is that both sides initiated action. For most of the day, it was the PAD attacking police formations, not the other way around. The police reported that PAD demonstrators utilized pistols, knives, and metal pipes during the clashes and also had gasoline-filled pingpong balls, essentially mini-Molotov cocktails. A western journalist told us that he had witnessed PAD supporters shooting at Border Patrol Police units around 1800 October 7 near the parliament. The journalist dropped down as bullets whizzed by; the police rapidly retreated around a corner. PAD supporters also reportedly fired a number of pistol rounds at police around 10:30 pm October 7 in the area of the Bangkok Metropolitan Police headquarters.

15. (C) The Public Health Ministry announced that 2 people, both civilians, had died and 443 were injured, including 20 police, as result of the October 7 clashes, figures reconfirmed later by hospital sources, although unofficial reports varied wildly. One police source claimed to us that there had been a police fatality after a PAD demonstrator ran a vehicle over an officer who later died at the hospital. However, the Toapoon district police station, the officer's home station, told us that the officer had not died and was receiving treatment at the Police Hospital.

16. (U) Police Major General Suraphon Tuanthong told the press that one of the October 7 deaths involved a former police

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major who had been a regional PAD leader. He had died when a Jeep Cherokee exploded near the Chart Thai Party headquarters on Sukhothai Road. The police continued to investigate the explosion.

17. (C) After the early October 7 police use of tear gas against PAD demonstrators near parliament, the Queen quickly expressed sympathy for the injured PAD demonstrators and donated 100,000 baht (approximately \$2,900) to help injured victims. The media did not report a similar gesture to police injured in the evening. PM Somchai visited both injured police and PAD demonstrators at a hospital mid-day October 8.

COUP RUMORS PERSIST

18. (C) With coup rumors persistent in the chattering class, significant attention continued to focus on the reaction of the Army. MFA PermSec Virasakdi queried the Ambassador October 8 on what international reaction would be to a coup. The Ambassador stressed to Virasakdi that the international community would react very negatively to another coup and said the USG expected the political situation to be resolved via the democratic process. In what may point to evidence of competing factions within the military and the elite, Virasakdi asked the Ambassador whether his response could be considered on the record. The Ambassador agreed, reiterating the impact that a coup would have on bilateral relations.

19. (U) Thai Army Commander General Anupong Paochinda continued to maintain that the Army would stay out of politics. He said publicly that a coup could be done easily, but that life after the coup would be difficult.

PM FOCUSED ON RULE OF LAW AND INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

110. (U) During a previously scheduled briefing to resident Ambassadors October 8, Prime Minister Somchai said the Thai government would continue to abide by rule of law in resolving the political crisis. Respect for international

and bilateral commitments played a prominent role in Somchai's comments. The Prime Minister said Thailand would maintain market-friendly policies and work to restore business confidence in order to attract foreign direct investment. The Prime Minister said, as Chair of ASEAN, he was committed to leading the organization and hoped to promoted prosperity within the region. Somchai promised to begin visits to ASEAN countries soon. With the global financial crisis a leading topic on the international stage, Somchai said the Thai government would share its experience in dealing with the 1997 Asian financial crisis at gatherings such as the ASEM Summit meeting in Beijing in late October and the APEC meeting in Peru in late November.

PAD AND GOVERNMENT PLANNING NEXT ACTIONS

¶11. (SBU) Somkiat Pongpaiboon, a PAD leader, told us October 8 that PAD supporters at Government House appeared tired but were committed to carrying on with the protests. The leaders of the movement continued to discuss next steps but believed firmly that they had ability to mobilize large numbers of supporters, especially in the aftermath of the bloody clashes with police. The key would be for PAD leaders to clearly lay out future plans to supporters, Somkiat said.

¶12. (C) Woravat Auapinyakul, the Culture Minister and PPP politician, complained to the Ambassador that media coverage had been heavily biased against the PPP; very little information had been provided about the lethal weapons utilized by the PAD. Somchai's government would soon need to take resolute action against the PAD in order to regain control of the situation in Bangkok, Woravat said.

¶13. (C) The rumor mill was active throughout the day with ongoing reports that the United Front Against Democracy (UDD)

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was mobilizing pro-government demonstrators from various provinces, primarily in the Northeast. However, a source at a Hospital told us that Bangkok-area hospital administrators, who met October 8 to draw up plans for taking care of mass casualties, had been told that UDD had not yet mobilized large numbers of supporters to come to Bangkok.

JOHN